Green River Basin Angler Newsletter 2004

"Conserving Wildlife – Serving People"

Newsletter Debut

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Green River Basin Angler Newsletter. This annual newsletter is dedicated to the aquatic resources in the Green River Fisheries Region. This area covers all the rivers, lakes, and reservoirs in the lower Green River drainage downstream from (and including) Fontenelle Reservoir. We have three fisheries biologists and one aquatic habitat biologist responsible for managing the fish communities and their habitat in the Green River Region. We do our best to visit the waters in the area, but only get to a small fraction of the fisheries each year. Therefore in addition to our scientific sampling data, we rely on information obtained from anglers and landowners to manage the fisheries resources in southwest Wyoming. We manage aquatic resources for you, the people of Wyoming, so your input is very important and we would appreciate any comments on the information in this newsletter. Please feel free to contact us using the information provided on the last page of the newsletter.

In this issue

Fish Need Water

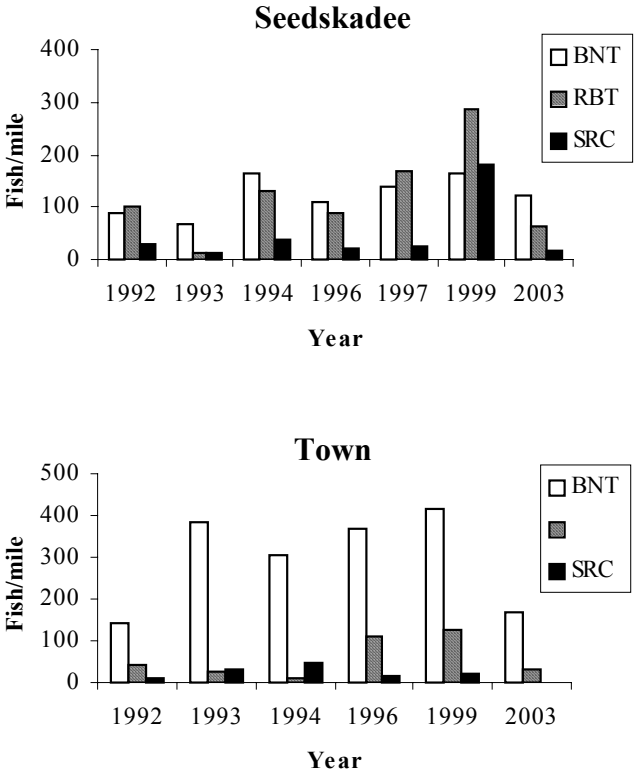
Drought has been a major topic of concern to our fisheries in recent years. Fish face many problems during prolonged periods of drought, including warmer water temperatures, less space to live, and decreased food availability. As streamflows decrease or reservoir levels drop, fish have to compete harder for limited resources and their growth usually suffers. When water temperatures warm, fish (particularly trout) become stressed and susceptible to diseases.

As the current drought lingers, the Green River trout fishery is starting to show the impacts. The last three water years have been characterized by minimum releases from Fontenelle Reservoir that represent a metering of the moisture received in the upper basin judiciously through the summer and winter. Low winter flows have significantly reduced winter habitat for trout. The main channel habitat in the Green River lacks diversity and suitable winter habitat. Side channel and backwater habitats are important to trout during the winter, particularly juveniles, because these areas provide low-velocity refuges and protection from large predators that are confined to the main channel. The low flows during the past three winters have reduced side channel and backwater habitat availability and caused increased winter mortality, especially for juvenile rainbow and Snake River cutthroat trout.

The low flows have also resulted in sediment deposition in the river. Silt has accumulated over much of the stream bottom. While this makes wading challenging, it is even more harmful to the survival of trout. Silt fills the spaces between rocks and gravel, decreasing the available surface

area for macro-invertebrates (the bugs trout eat) and leading to an overall decline in bug production. Silt is also problematic for the wild brown trout and kokanee salmon populations. If provided adequate flows these fish are capable of maintaining strong numbers through natural reproduction. When silt blankets spawning gravels, eggs suffocate before they hatch and trout don't do well.

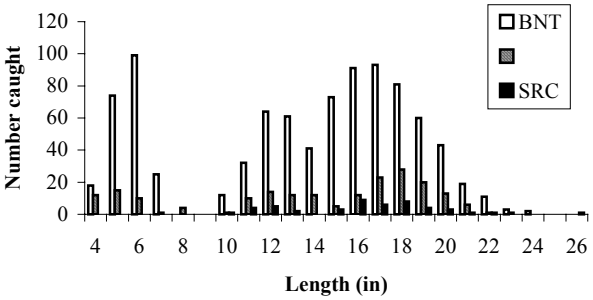
We manage the Green River trout fishery for wild brown trout, stocked rainbow trout, and stocked Snake River cutthroat trout. The fish population is monitored by electrofishing in April. This allows us to determine the relative size and abundance of trout as well as the survival of our hatchery stocks. Two sections of the Green River were sampled in April 2003, the Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge and the town of Green River. Our results revealed declines in the Green River trout population compared to estimates calculated from surveys completed in 1999.



Population estimates (fish/mile) for brown trout (BNT), rainbow trout (RBT), and Snake River cutthroat trout (SRC) in the Seedskadee and Town sections of the Green River between 1992 and 2003.

In both river sections, trout abundance was low compared to previous years. The abundance of all trout combined was 208/mile in the Seedskadee section and 196/mile in the Town section. This is only 35% of the estimated trout population in 1999, meaning the population has declined by approximately 2/3 during the past four years. The 2003 trout population appeared to be the lowest since 1996.

The brown trout population has declined by about 40% since 1999. Good numbers of large brown trout between 15 and 22 inches are still present in the river, but few small brown trout were captured compared to previous years, indicating that spawning in 2001 and 2002 was not very successful.



Length frequency results for brown (BNT), rainbow (RBT), and Snake River cutthroat (SRC) trout captured in 2003 surveys.

The rainbow and Snake River cutthroat trout populations have been most severely impacted. Both the adult and juvenile segments of the rainbow and Snake River cutthroat populations have declined. In 2003, the rainbow population was approximately 29% of what it was in 1999 and is the lowest it's been since 1994. The population estimate for Snake River cutthroat is the lowest in 10 years and only 10% of the 1999 estimate.

The most alarming aspect of the rainbow and cutthroat declines is the lack of juveniles, indicating that survival of hatchery fish has been very low. We believe that low flows have decreased the availability of juvenile habitat. This means that our hatchery fish are forced to occupy habitats with large trout and compete for the same food resources. The net result is that many of the

hatchery fish are either eaten by larger fish or do not survive the winter due to a lack of quality habitat and food.

The Green River desperately needs stable flows and occasional flushing flows to prevent further declines in the fishery. The trout population performs best under stable summer and winter flows. Fluctuations in flow can stress fish and negatively impact feeding, growth, and ultimately survival. Rapid changes in flow can also strand fish in side channels and backwaters, especially juvenile trout. Once stranded, these fish usually die.

The river has not had a flushing flow since 1999. Flushing flows are important because they clean the silt off gravel substrates. This ultimately increases the production of invertebrates and improves natural reproduction success for trout.

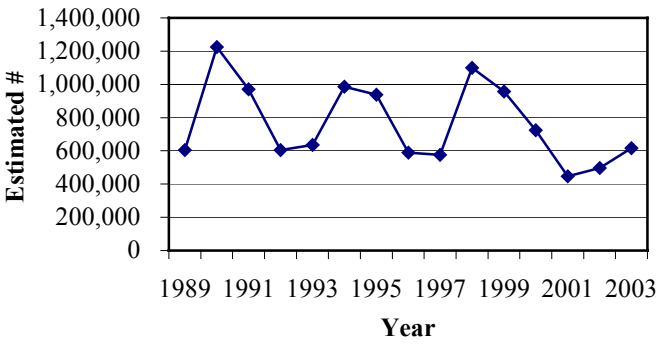
The future of this fishery is largely at the mercy of Mother Nature and future precipitation. But make no mistake, the Green River is worth fishing. Throwing streamers, nymphs, rapalas, spoons, or spinners can turn up some memorable trout and if nothing else the Green is a treat to fish if you like relative solitude and the chance for a large trout.

Flaming Gorge Update

Water will again be an issue for Flaming Gorge anglers and recreationists in 2004. After several years of poor snowpack in the Green River Basin, Flaming Gorge registered its lowest elevation (6008.7 ft) in February 2004 since 1980. As of late March, the 2004 forecasted inflow to Flaming Gorge was 64% of average. Rick Clayton, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), warns that inflows could drop to 54% of normal and maybe as low as 50% of normal if March and April precipitation levels are below historic averages. As of late March, lowland runoff had increased the reservoir elevation to 6009.7 ft. The reservoir is forecasted to fill to 6014 ft by May, decrease to 6012.5 ft as water is released in mid-May to meet the USFWS Biological Opinion for endangered fishes in the Lower Colorado River, and then rise to an elevation of 6014 ft by July. The BOR is forecasting flows in the Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam to be steady at 800 cfs after the May endangered fishes release.

The BOR has been doing a commendable job managing Flaming Gorge water levels throughout this drought cycle, especially during the critical October 1 through May 31 time period when kokanee eggs are incubating in the shoreline gravels of the reservoir. The reservoir elevation has dropped only 1.07 ft since last October. A 1997 study examining the impact of reservoir elevation on kokanee egg survival showed an 8.3% decrease in egg survival when the reservoir water level dropped by 3.3 ft. Since the elevation of Flaming Gorge has only dropped 1.07 ft since kokanee spawned last fall, loss of kokanee eggs should be minimal and will not effect kokanee recruitment in 2004.

Kokanee fishing in 2004 will be slow and probably not much better than anglers experienced during 2003. Population estimates for age 0+, 1+ and 2+ kokanee (1.4 to 13.8 in) show the population has decreased, even with relatively stable reservoir levels during the past 4 years. Kokanee populations are cyclical, meaning they exhibit a natural cycle of high and low abundance fluctuations. This cycle usually occurs over the course of 4-5 years. The low point of the recent cycle of young kokanee occurred in 2001. Kokanee numbers increased slightly in 2002 and 2003, but the 2003 estimate was still low (barely above the previous 2 lows in the kokanee cycle, which occurred in 1992 and 1996).



Estimated abundance of age 0+, 1+ and 2+ kokanee in Flaming Gorge from 1989 to 2003.

This is not good news for the future of kokanee in Flaming Gorge. Should the 4 year cycle repeat itself, the kokanee population could be in serious jeopardy and possibly on the verge of collapse. Hopefully, with help from anglers, the population will stabilize and once again return to high levels in the near future.

What can kokanee anglers do to help manage this valuable sport fish? No studies have been conducted examining hooking mortality (estimating how many fish die after the fish are released) by anglers, but most likely hooking mortality is high for kokanee. The reason for the high mortality rate is due to the basic anatomy of the fish. Unlike lake trout, kokanee do not have the ability to release air from their air bladders when caught from deep water. The deeper the kokanee are (especially during the summer) the more difficult it will be for kokanee to swim back down to the depth necessary for them to survive after they are released. If kokanee cannot return to suitable water depths and are stranded in warm, less oxygenated water, they become stressed and die. In order to reduce hooking mortality of released kokanee, please keep all the fish you catch and once your daily limit is reached stop fishing for kokanee and target lake trout, rainbow trout, brown trout or smallmouth bass. During late summer, one of the common methods to fish for kokanee is finding a school of adult fish and jig for them. Anglers not only fowl hook many fish by doing this, but they also tend to release more fish. It is hard to estimate how many kokanee are lost each year to hooking mortality, but fewer fish lost to hooking mortality will equate to more fish on the spawning grounds in the fall and increased recruitment of kokanee the following spring. The old saying "limit your catch and limit your kill" best describes the action Flaming Gorge kokanee anglers need to take to help manage their kokanee fishery.

On the other hand, the number of lake trout in the reservoir has increased significantly during the past 3 years. According to recent gill net sampling, the numbers of small lake trout (less than 25 inches) are the highest since the netting program began in 1990. The catch of small lake trout increased from 41 fish in 2001 to 63 fish in 2002 and then to 127 fish in 2003. The reasons for the increase are tied to a dramatic increase in the success of lake trout natural reproduction and several years of poor ice conditions, which severely limited the harvest of lake trout by ice anglers. Unfortunately we cannot control the weather, but we can affect the harvest of lake trout through regulations.

In order to bring kokanee and lake trout populations back into balance, anglers need to harvest lake trout. Lake trout regulations were liberalized in 2004, allowing each angler to keep up to 6 fish (only 1 lake trout may exceed 28 inches). Ice anglers took advantage of the new regulation and did their part in helping to manage lake trout by keeping limits of these smaller fish. In fact, Flaming Gorge ice anglers experienced some of the best laker fishing in many years. Now it is up to the boat anglers to do their part. It is imperative that anglers harvest enough fish in 2004 to reduce lake trout numbers, especially fish less than 28 inches. If these year classes of small lake trout grow large enough (usually 27 inches and larger) to where they eat only fish, the reservoir's kokanee population will be in trouble. This is not only bad for kokanee, but lake trout as well. The loss of kokanee, the key forage fish for lake trout, will ultimately lead to declines in the lake trout population. The lake trout will become thin, exhibiting very poor body condition and girth. Lake trout anglers may recall the last low in the kokanee cycle and remember how skinny the big fish were back then when lake trout measuring 36 inches didn't even weigh 20 pounds! All anglers, including those who consider themselves trophy lake trout fishermen, need to help manage the fishery by keeping small fish. The future of your lake trout and kokanee fishery depends on your willingness to help us harvest as many small lakers as possible in 2004.

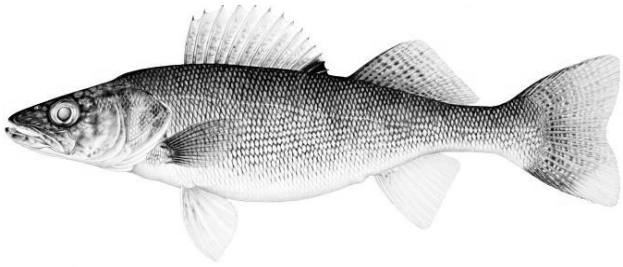
Illegal Fish Introduction

Fish managers carefully plan introductions of non-native fishes to enhance angling opportunities in appropriate waters. The introduction of a new species can severely impact local fish

communities. Introduced species compete with existing fish and ultimately change the fish assemblage. They can also carry and spread diseases or parasites. In certain situations, they may hybridize with established fish resulting in a loss of genetic purity. Often these changes to the fishery have disastrous consequences.

Take Flaming Gorge for example. I have heard a number of anglers express their desire for walleye in Flaming Gorge. While this may sound like a good idea (I enjoy fishing for walleye as much as anyone), the effect it would have on the existing fishery would not be good. The reservoir does not have enough food to support both lake trout and walleye. Kokanee are not only a popular sport fish, they are the main food supply for lake trout in the reservoir. If walleye were introduced they

Walleye (*Sander vitreum*)

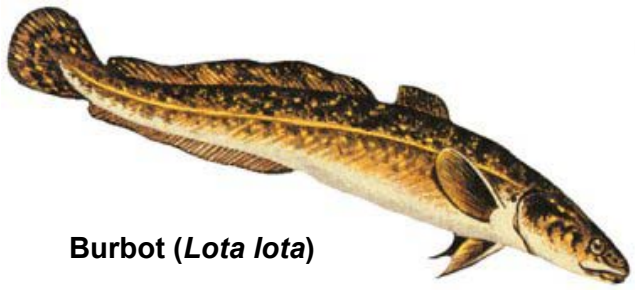


Lake Trout *(Salvalinus namaycush)*

would consume a substantial portion of the kokanee population. Eventually the kokanee would disappear because there are not enough to support both predators. Once the kokanee disappeared, the lake trout population would collapse. Walleye would also key in on stocked rainbow trout, brown trout, and smallmouth bass for food and these sport fish populations would eventually decline as well. Once walleye had eaten themselves out of house and home so to speak, their population would decline as well. Ultimately the angler suffers as the fishery quality declines. Flaming Gorge is a phenomenal lake trout fishery, one of the best anywhere. It also supports good populations of kokanee, rainbow trout, and smallmouth bass. It is a unique resource that provides plenty of quality fishing opportunities. We can't mess that up with the introduction of a species that the reservoir cannot support!

Illegal fish introductions, accidental or intentional, can devastate fisheries both where they are introduced and downstream. For the angler, this can result in fewer fishing opportunities. In addition, illegal fish introductions increase management costs (most people don't think about this aspect). This ultimately costs the angler because money was spent on damage control rather than improvements to the fishery.

Unfortunately, some of the waters in the Green River Basin have already been impacted by illegal fish introductions. Most recently burbot (ling) were illegally introduced to Big Sandy Reservoir.



Burbot (*Lota lota*)

From the reservoir, they rapidly spread downstream to the Green River and Flaming Gorge. This is bad news. Burbot are aggressive predators and will certainly impact local fish populations. The true outcome of this introduction will not be know for years, but it will likely have a negative affect on trout populations. Illegal introductions have also occurred in several other river basins such as smallmouth bass in Sulphur Creek Reservoir and rainbow trout in Salt Creek.

Due to the significant threat illegal introductions pose to our fisheries, the offense is considered a serious wildlife crime. The Wyoming Game and

Fish Commission Regulations, Chapter 46, Section 12 specifies, "No person shall transport live fish or live fish eggs from the water of capture except as provided by Commission regulations or as authorized by the Department." This includes use and dumping of illegal live bait and transport of any live fish away from the water in a live well.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is increasing enforcement of the laws concerning transportation and introduction of fish to new waters. The easiest way to avoid trouble is to make sure all of the fish you keep are dead before leaving the water you caught them in and do not transport any live fish from one body of water to another for any reason. We all share a responsibility to conserve our fisheries and anyone who witnesses' unlawful actions should report them to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department at (307) 777-4600.

Jim Bridger Treatment

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department will be chemically treating Jim Bridger Surge Pond during May 2004 to remove several undesirable fish species. Green River fisheries supervisor Robb Keith says the treatment is targeting walleye, common carp and white suckers.

"G&F personnel will apply rotenone, a chemical that is toxic to gilled animals such as fish, but is not harmful to humans, livestock or other wildlife at the concentrations used to kill fish," says Keith.

The decision to conduct chemical treatments is not one that Department personnel take lightly. Chemical treatments are a last resort when no other strategy will work. This decision was made following the discovery, in October 2003 that walleye had successfully reproduced in Jim Bridger Pond.

The presence of walleye is a concern because of the proximity of the surge pond to the Green River drainage and especially Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The problem isn't the prospect of walleye escaping from the pond and traveling down Bitter Creek to Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The concern is that some "selfish individual" will illegally transplant walleye from the pond to Flaming Gorge Reservoir.

Walleye gained access to the surge pond in 1998 as 2-inch fingerling with a group of smallmouth bass. The bass were stocked to prey upon the abundant juvenile white suckers in the pond. Unbeknownst to Department personnel, a few walleye were hiding among the 80,000 half-inch bass that were stocked. Initially, we hoped the walleye would die out without reproducing, thus avoiding the need to treat the pond. But in October 2003, two 6-inch walleye were netted during routine sampling, confirming successful reproduction.

Many anglers may be wondering about the popular crayfish population in Jim Bridger Pond. Most of the crayfish in the pond should survive the treatment. The concentrations of rotenone being used to kill the fish should not be lethal to the crayfish.

Although walleye are a valuable and much sought after sport fish, they are not compatible with the Green River drainage. Walleye are aggressive predators that eat other fish to survive. Walleye thrive in productive waters across the nation where there is an abundance of forage fish, but waters in the Green River drainage do not support the forage fish needed to feed and sustain walleye.

The primary forage fish in Flaming Gorge Reservoir is kokanee salmon. The kokanee population in Flaming Gorge Reservoir is currently very low, so low that lake trout are suffering. The Game and Fish increased the daily limit on lake trout in January 2004 and has been encouraging anglers to harvest lake trout for more than a year in an effort to get Flaming Gorge Reservoir's predator population (lake trout) and prey population (kokanee) back in balance.

If walleye were to become established in Flaming Gorge Reservoir they would not only negatively impact the kokanee and lake trout populations, but also the other sport fish including rainbow trout,

brown trout, and smallmouth bass. Adding walleye to the Flaming Gorge fishery would likely devastate this nationally important fishery.

White suckers and common carp are believed to have gained access to the surge pond via the pipeline that supplies water to the pond from the Green River.

The suckers are a problem because they compete with trout for the available food resources. When the two fish exist in the same water body, as with Jim Bridger Pond, the growth and survival of trout is negatively impacted. Carp are a problem because their feeding habits tend to muddy the water in the pond. Carp root in the bottom sediments for insects and crayfish, this activity suspends the sediments in the water and reduces the ponds ability to produce trout food, such as zooplankton.

The chemical treatment will be a temporary inconvenience for anglers in return for a long-term benefit and efforts to restock Jim Bridger Pond are already on-tap. We will wait approximately one month to give the rotenone time to become neutralized. Once we are certain the rotenone is neutralized we will restock the pond, most likely in late June 2004. The pond will be stocked with 4,000 catchable size rainbow trout and 2,500 three to four inch splake.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department would like to recognize Jim Bridger Power Plant personnel, PacifiCorp, and Idaho Power Company for their cooperation and on going support for maintaining the sport fishery at Jim Bridger Pond. In addition, we wish to thank them for providing logistical and financial support toward completing the chemical treatment of the surge pond.

Any questions regarding the fisheries at Jim Bridger Pond may call the Green River Regional Office at 1-800-843-8096.

Reservoir Action

Fontenelle Reservoir

Our 2003 sampling results indicated that brown trout are still the dominant sport fish in the reservoir. The number and average size (19 inches) of brown trout increased compared to the previous couple years and fishing for browns should be good in 2004.

Rainbow trout will also be available to anglers, but our rainbow catch rates have been low in recent years, including 2003. This trend is a likely indication that stocked rainbows have not survived well lately, probably due to high levels of predation by brown trout. In efforts to increase rainbow numbers in the reservoir, we changed our stocking strategy in 2001. Rainbows used to be stock at small sizes in the spring, but they are now stocked at a larger size in the fall. We hope that the time of year when they are stocked, combined with the larger size will allow these fish to avoid predators and survive better. More than 90,000 rainbows were stocked last fall and sampling in 2004 should tell us whether the current stocking strategy is working.

There are not a lot of Snake River cutthroat trout in the reservoir, but the few that are swimming around are big. That's because brood stock Snake River cuts have been stocked in Fontenelle the past couple years. Brood stock fish are large adults that have been used for spawning in the hatchery. Once these fish are no longer needed they are often stocked for anglers to catch. Late last fall, 600 Snake River cutthroat broods (ranging from 3 to 5 pounds) were stocked and should be readily available to anglers this spring.

One other bit of news anglers will be happy to hear is that kokanee made their return to the reservoir in 2003. Fontenelle produces kokanee of above average size, but a number of years ago the Department quit stocking kokanee due to whirling disease concerns. Those concerns are are no longer considered serious and more than 30,000 kokanee were planted last spring. Kokanee will be stocked again in 2004 and

anglers can once again look forward to quality fishing in the near future.

Viva Naughton Reservoir

Viva Naughton Reservoir is managed for rainbow trout, which are stocked in late summer each year. In 2003, 48,600 rainbow were stocked and based on reports from ice anglers most appear to have survived the winter. Winterkill has been a major concern at Viva Naughton the past few years.

Winterkill is a term that is used when fish in a lake or reservoir suffocate and die because there is not enough oxygen in the water. During the warmer months this isn't a problem because wind action mixes oxygen in the air with the water, but when ice forms the water cannot get oxygen from the air. If the ice is snow free, plants can still get sunlight allowing them to photosynthesize and produce food and oxygen. When snow covers the ice, plants can't get sunlight and they die. When they die, they decompose. As plants decompose, oxygen is used in the chemical process and if enough oxygen is removed from the water by decomposing plants then fish begin to die. This is the process we refer to as winterkill.

Fortunately, Viva Naughton did not winterkill this year. Anglers caught a lot of 14-18 inch rainbows at the annual ice fishing derby in late February and some even tied into 20+ inch fish. Based on this information, we are optimistic that rainbow survival was good and that should be reflected in fishing success this summer.

In addition to rainbows, splake were annually stocked between 1999 and 2002. Reports from anglers suggest these fish are still being caught and some have grown quite large (> 25 inches). Splake are a cross between lake trout and brook trout and are known to be an aggressive predator. Splake are fun to catch and because they grow relatively fast, they are a popular sport fish. Angler wishing to catch splake can start by trolling rapalas or spoons in deeper water.

Woodruff Reservoir

The news on Woodruff Reservoir is not as good I'm afraid. Low water in recent years has contributed to poor environmental conditions for fish. Warm summer water temperatures and low winter oxygen levels have plagued the reservoir in recent years. Rainbow and Bonneville cutthroat trout are still being stocked each spring, but these fish do not appear to survive well under current conditions. We will stock the reservoir again this year and monitor the population. But if fish don't survive again this year we will, unfortunately, be forced to discontinue stocking until the reservoir's water level increases enough to support trout again.

Sulphur Creek Reservoir

The rainbow and Bonneville cutthroat trout populations in Sulphur Creek Reservoir have struggled in recent years. Our 2003 data showed slight improvements in rainbow and cutthroat catch rates, but numbers are still low compared to the levels anglers enjoyed in the 1990's.

The introduction of brown trout in 1990's coincided with declines in rainbow and cutthroat numbers. Brown trout have been preying upon the stocked rainbows and cutthroats thereby reducing the numbers available for anglers to catch. In an effort to improve fishing, brown trout stocking was suspended in 2001. As the remaining brown trout die out, we expect the abundance of rainbows and Bear River cutthroat trout to increase.

Stocking strategies were also changed to improve hatchery fish survival. Larger rainbows and cutthroats have been stocked in the reservoir the past two years and in 2003, more than 20,000 rainbows and 58,000 Bear River cutthroats were planted. The idea is that larger fish may be able to avoid predation and survive better than the smaller fish that were previously stocked. So far, the results are encouraging. The catch rates of both trout species increased in 2003, suggesting that the new stocking strategy may be working.

Colorado River Cutthroat Trout Restoration

I'm sure many people are aware of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's ongoing efforts to restore Colorado River cutthroat trout populations. Some ask why we need to replace rainbow or brook trout populations with native cutthroat. As fisheries biologists, we are not only responsible for managing sport fisheries. We are also responsible for managing the aquatic resources from a watershed perspective to maintain ecosystem function and integrity. Colorado River cutthroat trout are native to the Green River watershed and play an important ecological role in healthy fish communities. It is our responsibility to preserve the health and diversity of aquatic systems by managing for native species whenever possible.

Rainbow and brook trout are more aggressive, particularly brookies, and often out compete cutthroat for resources in areas where they occur together. This normally leads to the suppression or disappearance of the cutthroat population. Therefore if cutthroats are to be restored in a drainage, other trout sometimes need to be removed.

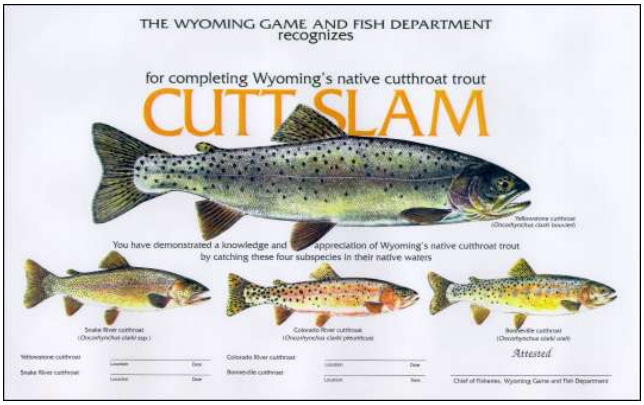
Fortunately, we have the best of both worlds with Colorado River cutthroat trout. Not only are they an important native species, they are also a wonderful sport fish. They survive well and can grow relatively large. Cutthroat are rather gullible which makes them easy and fun to catch. Depending on the water they inhabit they can be pursued with bait, flies or lures.

They are also quite tasty. Anyone who as cooked a fresh catch over an open flame on an overnight angling adventure knows what I'm talking about! Always check your regulations to see if a special regulation applies to the water you intend to fish.

Another reason Colorado River cutthroat trout are so important is that they are part of Wyoming's heritage. Cutthroat trout are the only trout native to this great state and were likely important to western settlers and Native Americans. They became established here for a reason, because this is where they evolved and thrive. Cutthroat trout have a lot of intrinsic value and we must ensure that strong populations are passed on to future generations.

Colorado River cutthroat trout are rapidly declining across their native range. In fact, they have been petitioned to be listed as a federally endangered species. So far those petitions have been denied and they are not yet considered an endangered species, largely due to the work Wyoming and other western states have done to preserve existing populations and restore this native trout to drainages where they had been replaced by non-native trout. Wyoming's wildlife should remain under the control of the people who reside in our state and Colorado River cutthroat trout restoration efforts are helping to assure that.

Cutt-Slam!



The Cutt-Slam is a program developed by Ron Remmick, the past Green River fisheries supervisor for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Ron was an extraordinary biologist and friend. He was deeply dedicated to protecting and preserving Wyoming's aquatic resources and had a passion for our native cutthroat trout. His program is designed to encourage anglers to learn more about Wyoming's cutthroat sub-species and develop more understanding and appreciation of the Department's cutthroat management program. The Cutt-Slam has become very popular and is a wonderful way to educate young anglers about our native cutthroat trout.

To complete the Cutt-Slam, anglers must catch and photograph Wyoming's four cutthroat trout sub-species (Yellowstone, Snake River, Colorado River, and Bonneville) in their native range. The photos are then presented to a Wyoming Game and Fish Department fisheries biologist for species verification, along with date and location information. There is no cost or time limit to complete the "Slam". The Department keeps records for anglers of each entry and once all four sub-species have been caught and verified, we send each participant a color certificate (pictured above) featuring all four sub-species recognizing your accomplishment.

Brook Trout Opportunities

Many anglers, including myself, love to fish for brookies. The reasons are as varied as the color of an autumn landscape in the Wyoming high country. Brook trout often occur in high densities, meaning when anglers find them, they tend to catch a lot of fish. Brook trout are very aggressive fish and are relatively easy to catch. This makes them a wonderful fish to target during family outings. In addition, many consider brook trout the tastiest of all the trout in Wyoming.

Finally, and perhaps the most important reason, is that brook trout usually occupy high mountain streams located in secluded, scenic areas. Solitude and scenery are often times the most enjoyable part of an angling adventure. Sometimes fishing is more about exploring the great outdoors than filling the freezer or adding to photo albums. Finding new waters and figuring them out is a rewarding experience. Chasing brookies in mountain streams provides anglers the opportunity to get out and enjoy mountain vistas and the abundant wildlife that often reside along pristine mountain streams.

Brook trout are a very important game fish and we strive to maintain good brook trout fisheries for our anglers. A number of Green River Basin drainages that support brook trout populations and provide angling opportunities are listed below. The majority of these areas are in the mountains on U.S. Forest Service land. Many other brook trout fisheries exist across the state and anglers are encouraged to contact their regional fisheries biologist to obtain more detailed information about fishing opportunities or directions on how to reach their destination.

General locations (mountain ranges) and specific drainages with brook trout populations in the Green River Basin.

General Location	Drainage
Southern Wind River Mountains	Upper Big and Little Sandy
	Upper Sweetwater River
	Pacific Creek
Southern Wyoming Range	Upper Hams Fork Tributaries
	North Fork Fontenelle Creek
	South Fork Fontenelle Creek
	North Fork Slate Creek
Uinta Mountains	East Fork Smiths Fork River
	Cottonwood Creek
Pine Mountain	North Fork Vermillion Creek
Sierra Madre Mountains	Roaring Fork Drainage
	Battle Creek
	Big Sandstone Creek and Tributaries
	McKinney Creek

Hatchery Renovations

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department currently operates 11 facilities that hatch and grow fish for stocking. Some of these facilities desperately need to be renovated and in 2003, the Legislature (for the first time in 60+ years) agreed to fund capital improvement and facilities maintenance at several hatcheries across the state. This is a welcomed appropriation of general state funding that will make sportsman dollars stretch further!

One aspect of future hatchery improvements will be slightly fewer fish produced by Wyoming's Fish Culture system during the next few years. As facilities are renovated, space to raise fish will be temporarily lost until construction is completed. This will not have a large impact on hatchery fish production, but does mean if fish are in short supply some low priority waters may not be stocked or stocking rates will be reduced. Most anglers will not notice any change in their

favorite fishing holes, but there is a possibility that some drainages may not receive as many stocked fish while the hatcheries are under construction.

A New Mission Statement for the Fish Division

Many of you may not know that the Game and Fish is responsible for the wildlife management of over 600 different species in the great state of Wyoming. The Fish Division is not only responsible for sport fish (those you love to catch) but also native non-game species and amphibians. And don't forget the most important element, their habitats. Our mission statement needed to reflect that philosophy, which is mandated by state statute, and in 2003 the final touches were placed on a new mission statement. We would like to share this with you because the new mission will be reflected in the management of Wyoming's fisheries.

Fish Division Mission Statement

"As stewards of Wyoming's aquatic resources, we are committed to conservation and enhancement of all aquatic wildlife and their habitats for future generations through scientific resource management and informed public participation. We will use an integrated program of protection, regulation, propagation, restoration and control to provide diverse, quality fisheries resources and angling opportunities. Our efforts will balance the productive capacity of habitats with public desires."

2004 Regulation Changes

Some fishing regulations have changed in 2004. The biggest change here in the Green River Region is the increase in the lake trout limit at Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Prior to this year the daily limit was 4 lake trout, but now anglers can keep 6 lake trout (only one lake trout may exceed 28 inches). The daily limit was increased due to the over abundance of 18-25 inch lake trout. These smaller lake trout need to be harvested and we are encouraging anglers to keep as many as they legally can.

There are other changes anglers should take note of both at the regional and statewide level. All the fishing regulation changes are highlighted in blue in the new 2004-2005 fishing regulations book. Please pick up a copy of the new regulations for a complete list. Remember, it is the angler's responsibility to know the regulations for the waters where they are fishing.


Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

2004 through 2005

Wyoming Fishing Regulations

How to Use These Regulations

1) Review the laws and regulations including methods of take and unlawful practices (pages 3-7).
2) Review general creel limits (page 2).
3) Consult statewide map (page 23) for drainage area of interest and regulations and seasons for that area (pages 10-21).
4) Use thumb guides for easy reference to drainage areas 1-5.
5) Look for area wide and individual water exceptions within each area (pages 10-21). ONLY EXCEPTIONS TO GENERAL FISHING OR BOATING REGULATIONS ARE SHOWN FOR EACH AREA.
6) New or changed regulations for 2004-2005 are highlighted in blue throughout the booklet.
7) If water of interest is not listed, general seasons and creel limits (page 2) apply.

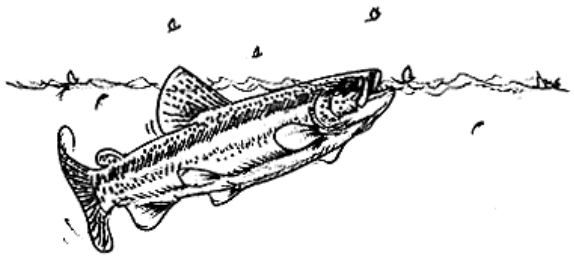
This fishing regulation booklet was updated and printed in December 2003.

Loose Ends

- Look for the 2004 Green River Region fishing forecast in the May-June issue of Wyoming Wildlife News.
- Wyoming free fishing day is June 5, 2004.
- Families and young anglers can look forward to fishing the urban ponds in our local communities this spring. These ponds will be stocked with catchable trout beginning in late April and stocking will continue through the end of June.
- June 19 is the annual kids fishing day at the Rock Springs County Fair Grounds. This popular event us sponsored by Trout Unlimited, Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge, Wal-Mart and Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Come join the fun.
- The Green River Fly Swap will be held on May 15-16. For more information call 1-307-872-0580.
- The 6th annual Wyoming Hunting and Fishing Heritage Expo will be held September 10-12, 2004 at the Casper Events Center. The Expo is a great event to take youngsters to and educate them about the value and diversity of Wyoming's wildlife resources. Every year more activities, exhibits, and seminars are added to the program so the 2004 Expo should be the best yet. For more information about the Expo, visit the Game and Fish's website at http://gf.state.wy.us, or call 1-888-EXPO-WYO.
- Anglers should look for the 2004 Walk-in Area Fishing Atlas. The 42-page guide features fishing areas enrolled in the Game and Fish's Private Lands/Public Wildlife Access Program.

Many thanks to this years newsletter contributors:

Robert Keith, Bill Wengert, and Lucy Diggins.



Visit us on the internet!
HTTP://GF.STATE.WY.US/

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